Newspapers by ancestry
https://www.newspapers.com/image/425499208

Downloaded on Mar 29, 2024

Stones | Hotel visit was surreal scene

CONTINUED FROM D1

Back then, you couldn't mention the Stones without referencing the Beatles. Things were simpler then, comparisons clearer. The Beatles were always No. 1 (to this day). The Beatles were cute; the Stones, even standing in the shadows, were ugly (hell, two of 'em – Jones and Jagger – looked like girls and the others like ghouls). The Beatles were melodists with a beat; the Stones ruled black and blue. The Beatles sang barbershop harmonies; dissonance was as close as the Stones came.

Then, as now, the notion of the Beatles as the primary innovators struck me as an ill-informed proposition that ignored the rapidly unfolding cross-fertilization of styles at the heart of the mid-'60s music explosion. This is not to slight the Beatles, whose freshness and originality – and staggering commercial success – carved a new rock'n'roll market in one great swoth.

They liberated the airwaves to what was possible, and a lot of talented British blues-oriented musicians jumped in and made hay, particularly the Stones, Kinks, Animals, Who and Yardbirds. (Jimi Hendrix, then a backup R&B guitarist, high-tailed it to London to establish his wild sound.)

This coincided with Motown's funky three-minute symphonies, Stax/Volt's solid soul-senders, and Bob Dylan "bringing it all back home" (and out by the Pacific the Beach Boys and Byrds). Radio had never spewed such a stew of sounds and styles in such concentration. Competition was ferocious. Nothing less than a new rock vocabulary was required. Every single was an announcement of something new. All the serious groups had to keep pace, the Beatles included.

How did this affect creation and innovation? In September 1964, the Animals from Newcastle in northeast England put six minutes worth of loud, juiced-up blues, House of the Rising Sun, on top of the charts. All over the radio, this primal twang was jacked up front in the mix (instead of being watered down, as whities like Pat Boone had done with Fats Domino stuff in the '50s).

The Stones felt compelled to re-establish their blues credentials with Little Red Rooster, a lascivious Willie Dixon tune, its bottleneck slide-sound shooting to No. 1 in England (a first for so-called "pure" blues).

The Stones created music as prototypical as the stuff they ripped off, cleverly utilizing the echoes at Chess and RCA Studios in Hollywood to isolate riffs and motifs, blowing them up pop-style and building songs around them.

Dark soul melodrama was their trump card (the hideously haunted falsetto came early on) a murky, shuffling version of Bo Diddley's Mona (I Need You), caught in a quicksand of reverb and percussion; the clattering, high-pitched, metallic rococo riff of The Last Time; the classic, fuzz-toned eight-note fanfare and vamp of (I Can't Get No) Satisfaction, as famous as the opening of Beethoven's Fifth, and its low, bumble-rock guitar riffs and elastic jungle-esque beat; the echoed, machine-gun drum roll in Get Off My Cloud; the impenetrably tough Charlie Watts and Bill Wyman rhythm section dropping bombs (new in pop); the shivery descending bass run, up front in the mix, in Nineteenth Nervous Breakdown; the fevered North African drumbeat and spooky sitar in Paint It, Black.

Hooks, riffs, licks, motifs – the Stones wrote the book.

✦✦✦

The biggest surprise was how small they were. (I've told this story so often that – in my mind at least – it sounds like a broken record.) In April 1965, with The Last Time riding the charts, the Stones arrived in Montreal to kick off their third crack at North America. My friend Simon and I went looking for them. We figured they wouldn't stay at a big hotel (they weren't superstars yet) and eventually tracked them down to the Hôtel Martinique (still standing as a Days Inn on Guy St.).

We infiltrated the premises by taking the service elevator to the top floor with a laundry guy from Jolicoeur who wished us "Bonne chance."

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MICHAEL DUGAS

Years after sneaking into the band's hotel as a teenage fan, Juan Rodriguez (centre) encountered Mick Jagger (left) and Keith Richards again as a rock critic, interviewing the musicians for The Gazette at the Rolling Stones' New York City offices.

It was like a surreal scene out of The Shining: an empty hotel corridor, luggage outside each of seven wide-open doors. Mick lolling in bed poring over ... fan mail? (Something so uncool you almost never saw it in fan-mag pix.) Charlie Watts was sacked out trying to sleep off the flu. Bill (Old Stone Face) Wyman, not nearly as ugly as he was in pictures, stood outside amiably chatting with a surprisingly light cadence to his voice.

Keith Richards, with a choirboy bob, wearing new blue jeans and cowboy boots, earnestly twanged on a large, gleaming, rust-coloured country guitar. When we asked him: "Is this all real? Like, is all this really happening, man?" – in the parlance of the day – he awed us. "We haven't come this far not to play for keeps." In 1965! Barely three years in! What determination! Against all odds (not least, the Beatles)!

Brian Jones, pale and cold, bags under his eyes, in natty Italian threads, turtleneck and two-tone canvas-and-leather shoes, carefully passed a large comb through his blond coiffure in front of a mirror. He broke his concentration to curse a bellhop over his order of drinks: "When I say double, I mean double!" Bitch.

(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction was around the corner. With Like a Rolling Stone by Dylan, it was that summer's transcendent double-whammy (with the Beatles' Help!)in window dressing). Rock'n'roll creativity was at a high from 1964 to 1966, before the red – drug-glazed navel-gazing – began to set in.

The Stones, too, briefly fell under Sgt. Pepper's spell with the

Jagger in 1977: rediscovering the band's catalogue can be revelatory.

execrable Their Satanic Majesties Request. But they rebounded to define hard-edged blues-rock with Jumpin' Jack Flash to Street Fighting Man to Sympathy for the Devil to Gimme Shelter. (Those four songs, taken as a whole, defined the darker zeitgeist of 1968-9.) When I saw Mick beating the Forum's stage floor with his belt during Midnight Rambler in the early '70s, I knew rock had become show business, a major industry.

I don't normally listen to many '60s rock sounds these days, though I still hear them in my head. There's a ton of music out there to hear; from here-and-now buzz to classics of decades and centuries ago. Time, it turns out, is not on my side. If I'm in the mood for raw urban blues, I might be inclined to listen to Muddy Waters around the turn of the 1950s, when he recorded Rolling Stone and I Can't Be Satisfied.

Besides, four years after meeting the Stones I became a pop critic and eventually burned out on rock. Interviewing Mick and Keith for The Gazette in 1977 as a gig wasn't quite as thrilling as I would've thought, although I remember telling Keith my teenage story and his evident enjoyment in rapping as a musician.

But listening to those early Stones albums – beautifully remastered in a new re-release a few months ago (but woefully lacking annotation) – has been fun. Rediscovering later stuff was revelatory. Shattered, from the 1978 Some Girls album, struck me as an ingenious three-minute, 40-second street-rock opera, ranging from doo-wop to punk to rap, to snappy rat-a-tat Manhattan jive. And the dark, paranoid Undercover of the Night, from 1983, seems better suited to today's political climate.

Well, this could be the last time. Slim as ever, staring down 60 – Watts is 61, snapping skins hard and tasty as ever – the Stones revel in music that's largely disappeared off the charts. Their traditional R&B sound endures, as always, through its indomitable riff-and-rhythm elements. Of course they don't "matter" like fun bands like the Strokes, White Stripes and Hives (who, bless 'em, skim Stones riffs).

The Rolling Stones are has long passed; now everything's in the playing, making every crosshatched note and chord count. Keef sees himself as Count Basie leading a well-oiled blues machine. Like the younger bands, he's in nirvana, living out his ultimate fantasy.

Juan Rodriguez was the pop-music critic for the Montreal Star and The Gazette from 1969 to 1980.

From Marquee Club to 40 Licks

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Last No. 1 hit single in North America was released in 1978

1962
Brian Jones forms the Rollin' Stones; first gig at the Marquee Club, London.

1963
Band signs with Decca Records and is renamed the Rolling Stones; first English tour with the Everly Brothers and Bo Diddley.

1964
First North American tour; first top 10 U.S. single, Time Is on My Side.

1965
First No. 1 single, (I Can't Get No) Satisfaction; second No. 1 single, Get Off of My Cloud.

1966
Third No. 1 single, Paint It, Black.

1967
Mick Jagger, Keith Richards and Jones are arrested separately for drug possession; Jagger and then-girlfriend Marianne Faithfull visit the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi with the Beatles; fourth No. 1 single, Ruby Tuesday.

1968
Band fires manager Andrew Loog Oldham and hires Allen Klein; Beggar's Banquet released.

1969
Jones and the band part company – a few weeks later, he drowns in his own pool; Mick Taylor joins band; fifth No. 1 single, Honky Tonk Women; Let It Bleed released; 300,000 fans attend the free Altamont concert, where Hell Angels stab a man to death.

1971
Mick and Bianca Jagger marry (divorced 1977); Rolling Stones Records launched; Sticky Fingers released; the band goes into tax exile in France; sixth No. 1 single, Brown Sugar.

1972
Exile on Main Street released.

1973
Seventh No. 1 single, Angie.

1974
It's Only Rock and Roll released; Taylor leaves band.

1976
Ron Wood joins band.

1977
Richards arrested in Toronto for heroin possession.

1978
Some Girls released; eighth (and last) No. 1 single, Miss You.

1981
Tattoo You released.

1985
Ian Stewart (piano/road manager) dies of a massive heart attack.

1989
Band inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; Steel Wheels album and tour.

1990
Mick Jagger and Jerry Hall, together since 1977, marry (divorced 1999).

1993
Bill Wyman leaves band.

1994
Voodoo Lounge album and tour.

1997
Bridges to Babylon album and tour.

1999
No Security tour.

2002
Career-spanning compilation Forty Licks released, accompanied by tour.

LOS ANGELES DAILY NEWS

Copyright © 2024 Newspapers.com. All Rights Reserved.
Powered by Newspapers.com